

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 0668

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KU

SUBJECT: NEW KUWAITI CABINET ANNOUNCED

SUMMARY: A NEW 16-MEMBER KUWAITI CABINET WAS ANNOUNCED FEBRUARY 9. IT BRINGS SEVEN NEW FACES AND THREE NEW MINISTRIES TO THE FORE. ATEEQI REMAINS FINANCE MINISTER, BUT THE OIL PORTFOLIO HAS BEEN SHIFTED TO ABDUL MUTTALEB AL KAXEMI, A BRIGHT, YOUNG, TW-TIME MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT. A NEW AND ACTIVE MINISTER OF COMMERCE IS A HELPFUL ADDITION. KUWAIT'S AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES, SHAIKH SALEM, RECEIVES SOCIAL AND LABOR PORTFOLIO. THE APPOINTMENT OF SHAIKH JABER AL ALI AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAS IMPORTANT INTERNAL RAMIFICATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON FEBRUARY 9, CROWN PRINCE/PRIME MINISTER SHAIKH JABER AL AHMAD, ANNOUNCED FORMATION OF A NEW 16-MEMBER KUWAIT CABINET WHICH, IF PAST PRACTICE IS FOLLOWED, PROBABLY WILL REMAIN MOSTLY INTACT OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS. THREE NEW MINISTRIES WERE CREATED:

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A) MINISTRY OF OIL HEADED BY ABDUL MUTTALEB AL KAZEMI, PAST CHAIR-

MAN OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S FINANCE AND ECONOMIC COMMITTEE; B) MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORT HEADED BY SULEIMAN HAMOUD AL ZEID, WHO WILL RESPONSIBLE FOR POSTS, TELECOMMUNICATIONS, CIVIL AVIATION, SHIPPING AND LAND TRANSPORT; AND, C) MINISTRY OF HOUSING LED BY HAMAD MUBARAK AL AYYAR, WHICH WILL SUPERVISE KUWAIT'S GREATLY EXPANDED NATIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM. ABDUL REHMAN AL ATEEQI LOST HIS OIL PORTFOLIO (SENSIBLE IN VIEW OF THE WORKLOAD INVOLVED), BUT RETAINED FINANCE, AND, PROBABLY, WILL REMAIN AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT THE GOK'S PRINCIPAL REPRESENTATIVE AT INTERNATIONAL OIL AND FINANCIAL MEETINGS.

2. KUWAIT'S AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES, SALEM SABAH AL SALEM, BECOMES MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND LABOR. THE SPECULATION IS THAT HE IS BEING GROOMED TO ASSUME THE FOREIGN MINISTRY PORTFOLIO, BUT IN THE MEANTIME WILL FIND HIS NEW JOB DAMANDING. NO ANNOUNCEMENT HAS BEEN MADE CONCERNING WHO WILL REPLACE HIM IN WASHINGTON. ABDUL WAHAB NAFISI, THE NEW MINISTER OF COMMERCE, SHOULD BE A MARKED IMPROVEMENT OVER OUTGOING MINISTER ADASANI. NEW MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR. ABDUL REHMAN AL AWADHI, IS A HIGHLY QUALIFIED DOCTOR, AS IS HIS WIFE. HE COMES FROM THE POLITICALLY POWERFUL KANDARI FAMILY. NEW MINISTER OF JUSTICE & AWKAF AFFAIRS, ABDULLAH AL MIFFREJ DESERVES NO SPECIAL COMMENT.

3. INTERNALLY, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE WAS ELEVATION OF SHAIKH JABER AL ALI AL SABAH TO DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (AS WELL AS MINISTER OF INFORMATION) AND THE RETENTION OF SHAIKH SAAD AL ABDULLAH AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND INTERIOR. IT HAD BEEN RUMORED THE LATTER MINISTRY WOULD BE SPLIT. THESE TWO APPOINTMENTS UNDOUBTEDLY WERE THE MOST DIFFICULT FOR THE CROWN PRINCE TO MAKE. THEY CLEARLY PUT SHAIKH JABER ALI IN THE LINE OF SUCCESSION AFTER THE CROWN PRINCE, WHILE LEAVE SHAIKH SAAD, HIS PRINCIPAL COMPETITOR, WITH CONSIDERABLE POWER AND INFLUENCE. SHAIKH SAAD PROBABLY HAS RELUCTANTLY RESIGNED HIMSELF TO NEVER BECOMING CROWN PRINCE, BUT JABER ALI MUST PERFORM WELL IF THE ABDULLAH-FACTION AND THE ABLE SHAIKH SAAD ARE TO CONTINUE TO PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE.

4. JABER AL ALI ALLEGEDLY WAS OFFERED TWO CHOICES, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND INFORMATION MINISTER, OR SECOND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (WITH SHAIKH SAAD AS FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER) AND INTERIOR. HE OPTED FOR THE FIRST, BELIEVING THIS GAVE HIM A LEG UP ON HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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QUEST TO BE NAMED CROWN PRINCE SOME DAY. ACTUALLY, THE FAMILY HOPED HE WOULD OPT FOR THE FIRST BECAUSE IF HE WENT TO INTERIOR HE WOULD CLEAN HOUSE. IN FACT, BEING NAMED DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, HAS NO REAL SIGNIFICANCE IN CROWN PRINCE CONSIDERATIONS. THE FAMILY WILL DECIDE THIS WHEN THE TIME COMES, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE HAPPY TO SEE HIM IN THE GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN SNIPING FROM THE SIDELINES. ANOTHER CROWN PRINCE ASPIRANT, SHAIKH SALEM, IS ALSON IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT. SAAD, JABER AND SALEM, AS MEMBERS OF THE SALEM BRANCH,

ALL QUALIFY TO BE NAMED NEXT CROWN PRINCE.

5. THE NEW CABINET IS, IN THE EMBASSY'S JUDGEMENT, AN IMPROVEMENT OVER THE OLD. AS INDICATED, OIL MINISTER KAZEMI PROBABLY WILL NOT PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE INITIALLY. HOWEVER, HE IS MODERATE IN HIS VIEWS AND BRIGHT AND DOES HAVE CONSIDERABLE KNOWLEDGE GAINED IN THE ASSEMBLY OF PETROLEUM AFFAIRS. HE SHOULD COME ALONG RAPIDLY. THE NEW COMMERCE MINISTER IS A DEFINITE IMPROVEMENT AND WILL PROVIDE A MUCH-NEEDED USEFUL AND KNOWLEDGEABLE POINT OF CONTACT IN HIGH GOVERNMENT CIRCLES FOR VISITING BUSINESSMEN. THE EMBASSY HAS MIXED FEELINGS CONCERNING THE APPOINTMENT OF SHAIKH SALEM. WE ARE DELIGHTED TO HAVE HIM AND HIS GENERALLY UNCONSTRUCTIVE AND UNHELPFUL POLITICAL ATTITUDES OUT OF WASHINGTON. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS RETURN TO KUWAIT, EVEN TO A MINOR MINISTRY, WILL GIVE HIM MORE READY ACCESS TO HIS FATHER, THE AMIR.

6. THE FULL CABINET LIST IS AS FOLLOWS: 1. HIS HIGHNESS SHAIKH JABER AL AHMED, CROWN PRIME CUM PRIME MINISTER; 2. SHAIKH JABER AL ALI AL SABAH, DEPUTY PREMIER & INFORMATION MINISTER; 3. SHAIKH SAAD AL ABDULLAH, INTERIOR & DEFENSE (UNCHANGED); 4. SHAIKH SABAH AL AHMAD, FOREIGN AFFAIRS (UNCHANGED); 5. SHAIKH SALAM SABAH AL SALEM, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AG LABOR (NEW MINISTER); 6. ABDUL AZIZ HUSSEIN, MINISTER OF STATE AFFAIRS (UNCHANGED); 7. JASSIM AL MARZOUK, EDUCATION (UNCHANGED); 8. HAMAD MUBARAK AL AYYAR, HOUSING (NEW MINISTRY); 9. HAMOUD YUSUF AL NISF, PUBLIC WORKS (UNCHANGED); ABDUL REHMAN AL ATEEQI, FINANCE; 11. DR. ABDUL REHMAN AL AWADHI, HEALTH (NEW MINISTER); 12. ABDULLAH AL MIFFREJ, JUSTICE & AWKAF (NEW MINISTER, MERGED MINISTRY); 13. ABDUL MUTTALEB AL KAZEMI, OIL (NEW MINISTER, NEW MINISTRY); 14. SULEIMAN HAMOUD AL ZEID, COMMUNICATIONS & TRANSPORT (NEW MINISTER, NEW MINISTRY); 15. ABDUL WAHAB NAFISI, COMMERCE & INDUSTRY (NEW MINISTER); AND 16. ABDULLAH YUSUF ALGHANIM, ELECTRICITY & WATER (UNCHANGED).

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7. THE FOLLOWING BACKGROUND MATERIAL CONCERNING THE NEW MINISTERS MAY BE USEFUL UNTIL MORE COMPREHENSIVE REPORTS CAN BE PREPARED: A) OIL

MINISTER KAZEMI, 39, OBTAINED B.A. (ECONOMICS) FROM CAIRO UNIVERSITY IN 1960 AND MASTERS DEGREE IN ECONOMICS FROM COLORADO UNIVERSITY IN 1970, SERVED IN FINANCE & OIL BUDGET DEPARTMENT IN THE FINANCE MINISTRY AND WAS ON THE AOC'S BOARD FOR FIVE YEARS. ELECTED DEPUTY IN 1971 AND RE-ELECTED IN 1975, WAS CHAIRMAN OF THE FINANCE & ECONOMIC COMMITTEE FOR FOUR YEARS. HE SPEAKS ENGLISH BUT PREFERS TO TALK ARABIC; B) LABOR MINISTER SHAIKH SALEM, 31, SERVED AS KUWAIT'S

AMBASSADOR TO BRITAIN AND NOW IN WASHINGTON, WITH CONCURRENT ACCREDITATION TO SEVERAL WEST EUROPEAN AND HEMISPHERIC COUNTRIES. HE IS ELDEST SON OF THE AMIR; C) HEALTH MINISTER DR. AWADHI, M.D. IN MEDICAL FIELD FROM SCOTTISH AND AMERICAN

UNIVERSITIES, REMAINED ATTACHED TO THE HEALTH MINISTRY AND KEPT CLIMBING THE SERVICE LADDER TILL HE BECAME MANAGER OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINES DEPARTMENT. ALSO AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE RED CRESCENT SOCIETY. ELECTED DEPUTY FOR THE FIRST TIME FROM QADESIYEH CONSTITUENCY; D) COMMERCE MINISTER NAFISI, HOLDER OF B.A. DEGREE IN ECONOMICS FROM CAIRO UNIVERSITY, SERVED IN SEVERAL GOVERNMENTAL POSTS AND IN THE STATE AUDITING BUREAU, LATER BECAME MANAGING DIRECTOR OF KUWAIT TRANSPORT CO., A BROTHER OF FORMER DEPUTY AHMAD AL NAFISI; E) COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER ZEID MAJORED IN ECONOMICS AND COMMERCE, SERVED IN SEVERAL GOVERNMENT POSTS AND LATER BECAME MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND OIL ASSISTANT UNDERSECRETARY FOR CUSTOMS AND PORTS; AND F) JUSTICE MINISTER MIFFREJ, 32, B.A. IN ARABIC LITERATURE FROM CAIRO UNIVERSITY, TILL NOW ASSISTANT UNDERSECRETARY FOR CULTURAL AFFAIRS IN THE EDUCATION MINISTRY, KNOWN FOR HIS RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION.
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